

Volunteer Organization Profile: Jumpstart

Volunteering in America 2011

Children in low-income neighborhoods start kindergarten 60 percent behind their wealthier peers and without the skills they need to be successful. Before even entering kindergarten, the average cognitive scores of children in the lowest socio-economic status (SES) group are 60 percent behind the scores of the highest SES group.¹ When children start behind, they are more likely to stay behind—a gap that widens over time and leads to increases in high school dropout rates, unemployment, incarceration, and countless remediation programs.

To stop and reverse this trend, volunteers at Jumpstart—a national early childhood education nonprofit headquartered in Boston and serving 14 states and the District of Columbia—serve a total of over one million hours annually tutoring up to three children each using a carefully designed curriculum that builds key language and literacy skills children need to succeed.

Meg Harwood, who grew up in upstate New York, and attends Emerson College in Boston as a Writing, Literature, and Publishing major, has spent two and a half years serving children as a Jumpstart volunteer and team leader, most recently at the Labouré Child Care Center in South Boston.

Meg spent her first Jumpstart year working with Bianca, helping her learn to recognize and write the letters in her name; developing her oral language skills; reading countless children's books; and becoming more confident in the classroom. By the end of the year, Bianca could point out all the letters in her name when they appeared in circle-time letter games, word puzzles, and signs around the classroom. After their work together, she was able to write a confident B-I-A-N-C-A, a seemingly small accomplishment that has far reaching affects on school readiness. Once quiet and reserved, Bianca began actively participating in circle time and volunteering answers for questions she was asked during their reading time. She overcame her shyness and became much more talkative with Meg and with her peers by the end of the year.

“Each day in Jumpstart is a small step forward,” said Meg. “All of the little accomplishments don't always seem like a lot at the time. By the end of my time with Bianca in the classroom, I was really able to see how much she had grown and progressed. It's really a pleasure for me to be a part of it and watch them grow and succeed.”

Since 1993, Jumpstart has trained more than 20,000 college students and community volunteers to deliver its program to more than 90,000 preschool children nationwide. Typically, more than 90 percent of Jumpstart children make gains in school readiness with an overall average growth of at least one developmental level after participation in the program.

“At Jumpstart, we truly value the role our volunteers play,” said Susan Werley Slater, executive director of Jumpstart Greater Boston. “In Massachusetts, our 725 volunteers play a

¹ Lee, V. E., & Burkham, D. T. (2002). *Inequality at the Starting Gate: Social Background Differences in Achievement as Children Begin School*. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute.

critical role in readying 1,500 Boston-area children across 50 local preschool classrooms for kindergarten and beyond.”

Jumpstart is a Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) grantee, most recently receiving state and national grants totaling \$5.6 million dollars. Of its nearly 3,500 college-aged and older adult volunteers, 85 percent are AmeriCorps members. CNCS also supports Jumpstart’s growth and development by leveraging federal funds for private funds and providing volunteer management tools and resources.

More information about Jumpstart is available at www.jstart.org. You can also follow Jumpstart on twitter: @Jumpstartkids or like Jumpstart on Facebook at www.facebook.com/Jumpstartkids.

The Corporation for National and Community Service is a federal agency that engages more than five million Americans in service through its Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America programs, and leads President Obama's national call to service initiative, United We Serve. For more information, visit NationalService.gov.